

# *PDS Leadership Team as Community of Practice: Implications for Local School System and Higher Education Partnerships*

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**ABSTRACT:** Professional development school (PDS) partnerships have existed in one local school system (LSS) with three different institutions of higher education (IHE) for over a decade. Commonalities and distinctive features were noted between the partnerships. In an attempt to establish standardized and equitable policies from the LSS level, representatives from each IHE were invited to a shared leadership meeting. From this first meeting, focused on PDS logistics and LSS policies, has grown quarterly collaborative meetings which have yielded professional development for mentor teachers and site coordinators, professional training for LSS and IHE faculty, and program level information sharing. Content analysis of meeting minutes suggests that a community of practice (CoP) was formed unintentionally and may have facilitated the development of the *Nine Required Essentials for PDS* in the Leadership Team PDS network. Strategies for the intentional planning of CoP in a PDS are provided.

*NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #2/A school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community; #3/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants; #5/Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants; #6/An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved; #7/A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration; #8/Work by college/university faculty and P-12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and #9/Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.*

## **Introduction**

In the preparation of new teachers it is common for a teacher education program to partner with one or more local schools to provide internship or student teaching opportunities for their teacher candidates. However, in the last 20 years Professional Development Schools (PDS) have emerged as a method to improve teaching, learning, and teacher preparation. This article describes the collaborative efforts of three PDS networks working together to advance PDS goals.

The typical PDS network, consisting of institution of higher education (IHE) and local schools, is bound by memoranda of understanding. In the case of this study, three such memoranda existed within one local school system (LSS) because three different universities coordinate internships and field placements with the LSS. The LSS is located in the mid-Atlantic region and provides education services to over 40,000 students in 66 schools. Two of the IHEs have maintained PDS

partnerships with the LSS since the late 1990s and the third established a partnership in the 2000s. Each IHE was assigned certain schools within the LSS for their own PDS network. PDS networks typically include 10-20 schools associated with one IHE. Two of the IHEs in this study are private, liberal arts institutions while the third is a public, comprehensive university. All are nationally accredited through the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Not surprisingly, given common requirements for accreditation at both the national and state level, commonalities existed between the PDS networks. However, several distinctive features also existed, especially in regards to the method of collaboration with the LSS. The LSS sought to consolidate practices into one consistent and equitable PDS policy manual. To do so, representatives from each IHE were invited to a shared leadership meeting. At the initial meeting PDS logistics and LSS policies were the focus. Five years later, quarterly collaborative meetings continue. Topics found in both state

PDS standards and the Nine Essentials of a PDS remain the focus of what is now known as the *PDS Leadership Team*. Content analysis of Leadership Team minutes revealed that the characteristics of a community of practice (CoP) were present. Also from this data, researchers have inferred that the benefits of the Leadership Team CoP would not have developed without a strong commitment to PDS and a well-established PDS structure.

Research literature on CoP has identified numerous benefits for organizations. Institutional leaders are using this knowledge of CoP to support activities such as staff training and project management. Learning from the Leadership Team CoP may prove valuable to advancing PDS goals and meeting the Nine Essentials of a PDS for other institutions. Strategies for the intentional planning of a PDS CoP are provided.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework grounding this research was Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated learning, whereby learning must occur in an authentic CoP. A CoP consists of "a group of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.139). The level of expertise necessarily varies as newcomers to a community learn community norms and engage in knowledge sharing at differing rates than veteran community members (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1998) and Wenger, et al. (2002) indicated structural characteristics required for a CoP including a domain of knowledge, a notion of community, and a practice. The domain of knowledge is the focus for the collaboration or participation in a group. This domain "creates common ground, inspires members to participate, guides their learning and gives meaning to their actions" (Wenger, et al., 2002). The community aspect emphasizes social interactions as a part of the learning. Wenger, et al. (2002) suggest that a highly functioning community encourages and supports interactions and encourages the sharing of ideas. The "practice" characteristic of a CoP is focused on the products of the community, what the community develops. The Leadership Team demonstrated each of these characteristics.

The role of CoP within the structure of an organization has also emerged in the research literature. CoP has been used as an organizational structure for knowledge stewarding rather than formalized training (McDermott & Archibald, 2010). In a CoP tacit knowledge is often more easily conveyed (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Benefits of CoP have been identified in loosely coupled systems or organizational structures (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In these systems/structures defined separations exist between entities; however, actions of the systems/organizations affect one another. PDS collaborations are often examples of loosely coupled systems because institutional separations exist between LSS and IHE. In an organizational chart one does not directly report to the other. Yet, the actions of each are intrinsically connected. This study focused on the relationship of PDS and CoP in meeting the Nine Essentials of a PDS.

## Literature Review

### Professional Development Schools

School-university partnerships have been suggested as a method to improve teaching, learning, and teacher preparation for over two decades (e.g., Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986; Holmes Group, 1990; Levine, 1992). During this period, various definitions for professional development schools have emerged and, both national and state-level, standards for professional development schools have been developed. PDS, by definition, connotes collaboration between schools and colleges/departments of education. Abdal-Haqq (1998) extended the purposes of the collaboration to include a shared responsibility for increasing student learning and achievement, engaging in sustained inquiry on practice, on-going professional development, and preparing effective new teachers. By these definitions the Leadership Team is an example of a PDS. In 2002, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed PDS Standards as a part of the accreditation process, providing further recognition to PDS as effective practice. In 2008, the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Executive Council and Board of Directors established the Nine Required Essentials of a PDS to help standardize understandings of what it means to be a PDS (NAPDS, 2008). The Essentials for PDS were used in this study to evaluate the developmental level of PDS exhibited by the Leadership Team.

### Community of Practice

The term "community of practice" appears in the works of many learning theory researchers (e.g., Lave & Wenger, 1990; Brown & Duguid, 1991) and is often applied in educational as well as organizational settings. There are differing definitions of the term, but most identify a community of practice (CoP) as a group of active practitioners working together on a common domain of knowledge, set of problems, or interests (Lave & Wenger, 1990; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cambridge, Kaplan, & Suter, 2005; Cox, 2005; Roberts, 2006; Putnam & Borko, 2000). CoP has many characteristics including the structural characteristics of domains of knowledge, community, and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002), but also in membership, as CoP frequently connect people who otherwise might not interact (Cambridge, et al., 2005). CoP often develops organically (i.e., without prior planning as a natural evolution of an organization), providing informal, social interactions and situated opportunities for the sharing of ideas and verification of thinking (Lave & Wenger, 1991; McDermott, 1999; Cox, 2005). Members of a CoP develop shared vocabulary and understanding, often having shared histories among members, which supports a communal memory (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Cox, 2005). In a CoP members are motivated to share knowledge. According to Wenger (2006) common activities of a CoP include problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, coordination, discussing developments, mapping knowledge and

identifying gaps, and site visits. The size of a CoP varies depending on the organization and can be small or large, meet face-to-face or online (Wenger, 2006).

A CoP is distinct from a team. The term “team” implies a group working together toward a distinct end goal. A team is defined by task and typically is dissolved once the task is complete (McDermott, 1999). A CoP is “defined by knowledge rather than by task, and exists because participation has value to its members” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). “Teams progress by moving through a work plan. Communities develop by discovering new areas to share knowledge and develop new knowledge” (McDermott, 1999, p. 5).

The benefits to a CoP are in the social capital created through the social interactions of members. Both whole community and individual benefits stem from learning new knowledge and sharing expertise (Duguid, 2005). Additionally there is a time savings through the sharing of both explicit and tacit knowledge. Through open discussions and sharing of practices others can avoid mistakes and more quickly learn what to do and how to do it (Dalkir, 2005; Duguid, 2005). This requires members to be motivated to participate and collaborate in the community. Not all communities of practice run smoothly. There are limits to CoP including power dynamics, issues of trust, and predispositions (Wenger, 1998; Roberts, 2006). Given the varying levels of expertise in a CoP, there are also varying levels of standing. These power dynamics can impact the negotiation of learning within a CoP (Roberts, 2006). Lack of trust limits knowledge sharing and collaboration and can stifle the ability of the CoP to learn or create new knowledge. Lack of trust can also exclude members from the community and limit learning (Roberts, 2006; Duguid, 2005).

A CoP, like most organizations, has a life cycle and experiences stages of development (Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter, 2005; Wenger, 1998). This life cycle is dependent upon the value the community provides to its members. Cambridge and colleagues (2005) describe a sustaining life cycle for CoP where a community experiences renewal through its developmental stages (inquire, design, prototype, launch, grow, sustain) whereas Wenger (1998) describes a cycle for CoP that ends when the community is no longer central to the needs of its members (potential, coalescing, active, dispersed, memorable). Both Cambridge, et al. (2005) and Wenger (1998) identify key features to the success of a CoP including having a clear purpose for the community, building strong social relationships, engaging in active learning, creating new knowledge, and developing products to benefit others. The extent to which the characteristics and activities of the Leadership Team satisfy the criteria of CoP will be evaluated in this research. Further, the role of PDS in supporting the formation of CoP and the role of CoP in assisting the Leadership Team as a PDS in meeting the Essentials will be discussed.

## Historical Context

A historical narrative is provided to describe how the Leadership Team developed and to provide examples of typical activities and accomplishments.

## Development of the PDS Leadership Team

Prior to the development of the Leadership Team, the responsibility for overseeing and coordinating PDS partnerships within the LSS was given to a central office administrator. This administrator was to attend all PDS meetings for each IHE partner, maintain all memoranda of understanding, and manage a small LSS budget designated for PDS. A newly appointed Director of Curriculum and Professional Development would change these procedures, preferring a centralized approach for LSS PDS partnerships. To support her vision, a new position, LSS PDS Liaison, was created and the first leadership meeting with IHE partners was convened.

The LSS PDS Liaison invited the department chairpersons or their designee from each institution to attend the first meeting. At this meeting other key stakeholders were identified such as IHE PDS Coordinators/Liaisons, Professional Learning staff, and LSS Human Resources Officers. Also at this meeting a decision was made to host subsequent meetings over lunch in a local restaurant with separate meeting space instead of in a LSS conference room. This supported a social dynamic to the Leadership Team. Today, the Leadership Team includes approximately 8-10 members at any given time. The LSS PDS Liaison leads the meetings, each institution designates their own representatives, and each member is an equal on the committee. Various individuals have filled these roles over the past five years, but the commitment to the Leadership Team has not wavered. An analysis of Leadership Team minutes highlights this commitment. In five years there has only been one meeting where one of the partners was not represented (n=22 meetings).

## Activities and Accomplishments

Initial Leadership Team meetings set out to establish consistency across all IHEs on common administrative components of PDS such as the selection process for mentors and site coordinators, payment schedules, intern intervention expectations, and policies for interns substituting in schools. Each IHE shared their procedures and expectations and collaborative dialogue followed. Consensus was reached and the first LSS PDS policy manual was created. The manual included standardized job descriptions for site coordinators and mentor teachers, co-teaching/co-planning expectations, communications flow-charts and procedural expectations that were not dependent on IHE affiliation of the schools. Further, the LSS established a PDS website where policy documents were housed and information on the collaborative nature of PDS; not just with the individual IHEs placing interns in schools, but also across institutions.

Policy manual development spanned four meetings during the first year of collaboration. Subsequently, all members agreed that the collaboration established and the sharing of best practices was valuable and should continue. With intentionality, the Leadership Team established norms for operations and established a purpose for Leadership Team work including: a) facilitate PDS communication/collaboration; b) support plan-

ning for LSS/IHE professional development; c) provide a venue to discuss LSS and IHE goals and needs; d) pursue grants; e) serve as a vehicle for providing consistency among PDS network partners; and f) provide support for teacher candidate internship placements. State PDS standards guided the establishment of purpose and norms for operations.

In subsequent years, the Leadership Team focused efforts on mentor teacher training, offering three after-school training sessions each year. These trainings were co-presented with LSS and IHE representatives. Numerous topics applicable for mentor teachers were presented such as: roles of the mentor teacher, three C's of mentoring, courageous conversations, dialogue tools, universal design for learning, mentor leadership, co-planning/co-teaching, mentor professionalism, and mentor communication. Site coordinator training was also offered; however, with less frequency and with smaller numbers participating. As may be expected, enrollment over time declined. Therefore, the Leadership Team collaboratively adjusted professional development topics to respond to needs of teachers.

In addition to LSS and teacher needs, the IHEs identified needs of their own. For example, the LSS implemented a new curriculum and IHEs needed to learn more about the content and expectations for students. The Leadership Team hosted curriculum meetings on IHE campuses. At these meetings LSS curriculum specialists presented the curriculum and shared typical teaching methods with IHE faculty and supervisors. Another need was addressed through an LSS hosted Higher Education Summit. At the summit, research and best practices of the LSS were shared by LSS professionals and collaborative research was encouraged.

Often, Leadership Team discussions and review of activities were connected to state PDS Standards. For example, the Leadership Team identified key components to memoranda of understanding, negotiated logistics for teacher candidate background checks, developed procedures for mentor teachers and site coordinators to earn state department of education continuing education credits, and discussed state and national accreditation efforts. Members of the Leadership Team have co-presented at NAPDS conferences on two occasions.

Using the Essentials of PDS, four Leadership Team members engaged in self-reflection in the context of the Essentials and determined that the Leadership Team had demonstrated all Nine Essentials of PDS to varying degrees. This was a point of pride for the Leadership Team. The team strongly felt that their success was rooted in their commitment to PDS and to PDS standards of practice. The PDS focus provided the domain of knowledge for the Leadership Team to sustain and the changing needs of, and requirements on, schools and teacher education programs provided numerous domains of practice for the Leadership Team to create new products. It is unlikely that three IHEs (which could be seen as competing with each other for LSS resources) would collaborate as willingly and openly if it were not for the PDS culture established in each network and supported by the LSS.

Believing the PDS collaboration of the Leadership Team to be unique, a sub-group of Leadership Team members set out to produce a program description journal article to share their learning with others.

At an initial planning meeting for article development, a leadership team member familiar with CoP research literature suggested that the Leadership Team PDS had also become a CoP. From this assertion, several members questioned the role of CoP in facilitating achievement of the goals of the Essentials. To evaluate the question, a qualitative research study was designed using content analysis of Leadership Team minutes as a methodology to determine the role and influence of CoP on the Leadership Team in meeting the Essentials.

## Purpose

The purpose of this research was to determine if the development of a CoP facilitated the success of the Leadership Team in meeting the Nine Essentials of a PDS. The research questions that guided the study included:

1. Was a community of practice established by the Leadership Team?
2. To what degree did the Leadership Team meet the Nine Essentials for PDS?
3. What was the role of community of practice in meeting the Nine Essentials for PDS?

## Method

To respond to the research questions a qualitative research design using content analysis of Leadership Team minutes was conducted ( $n=22$ ). Conventional content analysis was an appropriate method to use because the researchers aimed to describe the phenomena included in the minutes in order to answer their research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). There was limited research on how PDS might support CoP; therefore no pre-existing codes or coding schemes were used. Instead a general inductive approach was used (Thomas, 2006; Thomas, 2002). With the inductive approach, analysis was guided by the research questions and objectives. The minutes were reduced to a summary format to allow for ease in determining frequent topics and for themes to emerge. To enhance trustworthiness of findings, the researchers implemented a training protocol and had two researchers (Leadership Team members) and two individuals not associated with the Leadership Team, but familiar with PDS, analyze the data set of minutes.

The training protocol included the reading of two journal articles on content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The Hsieh and Shannon (2005) article provided examples of coding from meaning unit to condensed meaning unit, to code, and finally theme. These examples were provided to support data analysis and encourage consistency in interpretation processes.



Initially, two Leadership Team members (both from IHEs) conducted individual content analyses of the minutes. Each read and re-read the minutes extracting domains and sub-categories of information. Next, the two debriefed to reach consensus on theme areas (in Table 1, Leadership Team Researchers' Consensus on Minutes). Recognizing their own personal bias toward the Leadership Team and their IHE perspective on the minutes, two additional analyses of the minutes were completed by individuals not associated with the Leadership Team. One was a site coordinator and the other a graduate assistant who had completed an internship in a PDS school (in Table 1, Non-Leadership Team Member A and B Analysis).

Similarities and differences were found between the themes that were developed by Leadership Team and non-Leadership Team analyses. Only the theme of *Communication* was identified by all reviewers. Meeting minutes that denoted communication included information shared by LSS and/or IHE partners regarding logistics, initiatives, and events such as (pseudonyms have been used throughout):

"Joan shared an outline for the application process for intern substitutes – in an effort to accomplish a more efficient way to gather all information from the intern substitutes. See sheets handed out. Emails to interns would come from university and copy Joan in the email."

"Team reviewed the final SOP for adding PDS schools. Anna suggested that we add 'partner' to the title as well; Cathy will revise and send the final SOP to team members via email. Cathy will post the final SOP document on the LSS PDS webpage."

"The next LSS PDS Mentor Training will be held on June 2, 4:30-7:30 PM at XXX. Cathy shared the flyer that will be sent to all PDSs and partner schools via email."

"The group set meeting dates for the 2009-2010 year. Dates are: . . ."

"LSS updates from Joan – Joan will no longer be a part of the team; Leslie will assume HR liaison responsibilities. This was effective January 1<sup>st</sup>. Leslie will take over the wonderful job of organizing our meetings."

"New building – parking is an issue for substitute orientations – we may need to come to you."

"Cathy and the group discussed setting up tables to advertise graduate programs on Wed., August 15 at 7 PM."

Through dialogue and further interpretation by three Leadership Team members (including the two who had conducted content analyses) four additional themes were identified using inductive reasoning: planning, resources, reflection, and accountability (Table 2). To provide context for the typical activities/comments for each of the four new themes, overall descriptions with sample comments are provided below.

## Planning

Content included under *Planning* ranged from planning professional development opportunities to clarifying mission and goal development to strategic planning and needs assessments. Representative comments for this theme are:

"Time management is an overwhelming issue and mentors doing a portion of their interns work. Could we do a basic time management session that could be transferred from mentors to interns – different levels of multitasking – and how to handle?"

"Sophie would like to have an opportunity for the university teachers who teach methods courses to meet with LSS staff to look at methodologies and curriculum. The IHE would be willing to host this. Will include the content and we'll have to think about logistics – possibility – Joan meets every Friday 8:30 – 11:30 AM with staff and could meet with curriculum specialists. Think about setting aside a day and join our department meeting. And maybe do it in the fall. Be thinking about a date to do this. Sophie will check on a room. Whomever you can get from the university can attend."

"Planning for PDS Site Coordinator training – September 15<sup>th</sup>. All training will be held at XX school. . . Start with a whole group piece and ice breaker – job description and confidentiality 45 minutes and do break outs by university specific items."

## Resources

Content included under *Resources* ranged from discussions on budget allocations and use of facilities to site coordinator and mentor teacher stipends and use of shared personnel expertise. Some discussions were presentations of information on budgets and procedural matters while others engaged Leadership Team members in deciding best methods for use of resources. Representative comments for this theme are:

"Use by LSS of IHE site locations – XX site would work for HR screenings and having an outside venue is a nice setting for meetings."

"If our PDS budget stays the same we'll have the opportunity for 3 more evenings next year."

"We still don't know what our budget will be for next year."

"LSS budgeted money for PDS was discussed. Cathy shared some background information on how the funds had been used in the past. . . We have approximately XX left to spend after stipends are paid. Do we want to use some type of voucher and pay varying amounts by university or give to principals and schools and they work it out. . .?"

Table 1. Content Analysis of Minutes by Leadership Team and Non-Leadership Team Members

<i>Leadership Team Researchers' Consensus on Minutes</i>	<i>Non-Leadership Team Member A Analysis</i>	<i>Non-Leadership Team Member B Analysis</i>
<b>Planning:</b> Includes professional development (preparation and participation in shared PD opportunities), mission and goal development	<b>Support:</b> Includes new interns, bringing them to monthly trainings; PDS DVD; specific help from experts for special education interns; lesson planning; scripted lessons; intern placement support; opportunity for LSS to help universities; university teachers who teach methods courses to meet with curriculum specialists; mentor support with generational difference of mentoring 21 <sup>st</sup> century intern; training for mentor teachers; site coordinators to meet and receive specialized training; more involvement from institutions with curriculum-based information	<b>Efficient Line of Communication</b> Includes sharing ideas, sharing resources, sharing LSS policies and initiatives
<b>Resources:</b> Includes discussions on funding, use of facilities, time, stipends, expertise, people, rewards.	<b>Communication:</b> Includes direction by PDS Liaison; network of resources and ideas; sharing dialogue tools; share guidelines; fingerprinting information and interview scheduling for substitute orientation; communication better for what PDS coordinators are to do; sharing our PDS system; retention rates; intern application and process; HR share information on email system and online application.	<b>Developing consistency between all PDS partners and LSS</b> Includes developing terminology, mentor selection, job description, responsibilities, stipends, credit and training, site coordinator job description, responsibilities, stipends, and training, and memos of understanding.
<b>Communication:</b> Includes information shared by LSS and/or IHE regarding logistics, initiatives, and events	<b>Leadership:</b> Includes planning for mentor trainings; PDS training with breakout sessions; professionalism; bringing in first year completer teachers; strategic planning session to involve schools and discuss issues interns need; curriculum sharing meetings for what is new; common core; and assessment.	<b>Activities that benefit Interns</b> Includes facilitate intern placements from PDS and non-PDS IHE; matching interns with trained mentors for greatest effectiveness; resolve issues with consistency; access to LSS support staff; intern professional development beyond mentor's classroom; interns included in LSS programs for new teachers; participation in on-site PD for all teachers; intern planning for scripted programs requiring adherence to program design.
<b>Roles:</b> Includes job descriptions, rewards, and recognition	<b>Accountability:</b> Includes mentor state department of education credit; site coordinator responsibilities; administrators attending meetings; principals sign two-year agreement; mentors try to work out placements; inform LSS administrators; interns expectations; intern absences; field placements and internships.	<b>Activities that benefit Mentors</b> Includes qualifications and selection process; training for all PDS partners; topics mutually relevant (time management, courageous conversations, performance coaching, role of the mentor, action research); texts provided for training; coordination of presenters and session planning; credits earned from MSDE; Teachers for Teachers; seminar; field placement credit (1); site coordinator training role; action research and collaborative inquiry project.

Table 1. Continued.

<i>Leadership Team Researchers' Consensus on Minutes</i>	<i>Non-Leadership Team Member A Analysis</i>	<i>Non-Leadership Team Member B Analysis</i>
<b>Reflection/Assessment:</b> Includes review of mentor training feedback, hiring data review, joint presentation at NAPDS.	<b>Clarification:</b> Includes job descriptions; mentor matching; how to become a site coordinator; specific guidelines and expectations for job; intern a substitute teacher policy; revised regulations for mentors; memos of understanding; sharing with staff what PDS means; courageous conversations; sharing how much time is used to be a mentor.  <b>Funds:</b> Includes use for future PDS professional development; grant opportunities; fingerprinting costs; books; book study as part of training; create handbook for new principals and site coordinators; payment scale for site coordinator; resource sharing; staff trainings.  <b>Reward:</b> Includes state credit hours for mentors; sliding scale for the other teachers that work with interns.  <b>Reflection:</b> Includes reflection on PDS programs; sharing data and talking about it; first preference for hiring is for students who have gone through the PDS process.  <b>Relationships:</b> Includes mentor/intern relationship; being able to talk about the hard stuff; sharing what mentors do outside of school; co-teaching; better ways to place and match interns and mentors; support to help mentors talk to their intern; prek-20 for quality workers in the school system; TPACK selecting, and using the correct technology.	<b>Benefits to LSS</b> Includes interns as substitute teachers; LSS processing and fingerprinting; allows for mentor participation in PDS activities without paying for substitutes; facilitation of employment application process for interns; screening dates coordinated for each IHE interns; hiring priority given to interns in LSS PDS Schools; identification of minority candidates; teacher retention data shared; best practices and research shared by university staff directly and through interns; opportunity for LSS staff to pursue individual Professional Development Plan goals.  <b>Support of University goals by LSS</b> Includes IHE staff updates on LSS initiatives and curriculum; invited to Curriculum Workshops given by curriculum specialists; IHE supervisors and professors meet with LSS directors and curriculum specialists; UDL training opportunities; plans for transition to CCSS; teacher evaluation training; Global Scholar Assessments; STEM; Salient 5; documentation for NCATE review; IHE represented on site-based steering committee or leadership teams; promote graduate programs; and pursue grant opportunities for all PDS.

Table 2. Final Themes from Content Analysis on Leadership Team Minutes

Theme	Content Included
Communication	Includes information shared by LSS and/or IHE regarding logistics, initiatives, and events; sharing of best practices; development of job descriptions (site coordinator, mentor teacher); mentor matching strategies; mentor recruiting; intern substitute teaching policies; policy revisions (e.g., memos of understanding, definitions for PDS); strategies for courageous conversations; IHE staff updates on LSS initiatives and curriculum; IHE supervisors and professors meeting with LSS Directors and Curriculum Specialists; UDL training opportunities; plans for transition to CCSS; teacher evaluation training; assessments; accreditation; recruiting for graduate programs; and pursue grant opportunities for all PDS
Planning	Includes planning for professional development opportunities; clarifying mission and goal development; PDS strategic planning; identifying curricular needs; and assessment
Resources	Includes funding sources/LSS PDS budget allocation; use of facilities; time; stipends; expertise; rewards
Reflection	Includes review of professional development feedback/evaluations and hiring data; joint presentation at NAPDS; sharing other PDS data and holding discussions
Accountability	Includes mentor continuing education credit; issues when site coordinator or mentor teachers are not fulfilling duties; notification systems; memoranda of understanding; intern placements and accountability; LSS administrator PDS expectations; interns PDS expectations; intern absences policy; intervention policies

“Sally shared that she will be sending the charts to update interns, phase and supervisors for the spring. This chart should include site coordinator information as well to ensure accuracy of the second round stipend payments.”

“The budget should remain the same as in the past with one change. The site coordinators will receive one stipend check a year. This will make it easier for bookkeeping purposes.”

## Reflection

Content included under *Reflection* ranged from review of professional development session feedback and evaluations to analysis of hiring data and means of sharing PDS learning to a broader community. In these discussions either data or a specific problem were presented and the Leadership team deliberated on the best course of action given the findings of the group. Representative comments for this theme are:

“Comments from training: Training was organized different this time. Overall comments were positive; everyone received text. Based on comments some contents from the book will be revisited for the next training. Cathy noticed comments from folks who actually preferred breakouts and more movement. Possibly for March’s training we’ll go back to that structure.”

“Another very successful evening. Very positive. Cathy provided copies of all handouts and the agenda from the night. The attendance roster is included. Evaluation comments from the participants was provided. Participants really liked the break-out sessions and the

movement. Anita said that there was difficulty keeping the focus of their group on the good intern instead of the struggling intern. Some participants brought interns.”

“XX data showed that LSS only lost 5 folks from this partnership – she shared a chart, and she pulled individual files to obtain and shared with the group the reasons why these folks left our system. This group had 68 participants so 63 or 92% were retained. Joan will continue to look at all three universities numbers and share information.”

## Accountability

Content included under *Accountability* ranged from discussions on equity in providing continuing education credits to procedures and policies on maintaining PDS expectations. These discussions were often lengthy and in some cases spanned multiple meetings. IHEs often shared their procedural approach to a situation and then the whole group would develop a LSS/IHE approach for the PDS. Representative comments for this theme are:

“Cathy shared that the state department of education has an approval course number for field placement experiences. LSS will be providing field placement mentor teachers with one continuing education credit starting with the 2009-2010 school year.”

“Tom shared background and tidbits – web-based – performance series and achievement series and some pros of assessment via Global Scholar. . . This will give LSS instant assessment information, class results and systemic information.”

Lastly, to evaluate the degree to which the Leadership Team meet the Nine Essentials for PDS, a Leadership Team member



Table 3. Theme Alignment with *Nine Essentials for a PDS*

<i>Nine Essentials</i>	<i>Theme(s) Addressed</i>
1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;	-Communication -Planning
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;	-Communication
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;	-Planning -Resources -Accountability
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;	-Communication -Planning -Reflection
5. Engagement in and public sharing of the results of deliberate investigations of practice by respective participants;	-Communication -Planning -Reflection
6. An articulation agreement developed by the respective participants delineating the roles and responsibilities of all involved;	-Communication
7. A structure that allows all participants a forum for ongoing governance, reflection, and collaboration;	-Communication -Reflection -Accountability
8 Work by college/university faculty and P–12 faculty in formal roles across institutional settings; and	-Communication -Planning -Accountability
9. Dedicated and shared resources and formal rewards and recognition structures.	-Communication -Resources -Accountability

(who conducted a content analysis) created an alignment chart to identify which of the Essentials for PDS were met in each theme area. Three other members of the Leadership Team reviewed the alignment chart to ensure agreement on alignment decisions (Table 3).

## Data Analysis and Findings

The content included in each overall theme was extracted in Table 2 to provide a summary of the types of activities that were observed through analysis of the minutes and negotiation of theme development. These data were evaluated to determine whether a CoP was formed through the Leadership Team. The alignment chart was used to determine the degree to which the Leadership Team met the Essentials for PDS. Along with data presented in Tables 2 and 3, other less tangible aspects of the team (e.g., establishment of trust, willingness to collaborate) that were not captured in meeting minutes were used to identify the role CoP played in achievement of the Essentials.

### Was a Community of Practice Established by the Leadership Team?

Content analysis of the Leadership Team minutes (n=22) provided evidence of all three structural characteristics of a CoP: domain of knowledge, notion of community, and a practice. The

shared domain of knowledge on teacher education and PDS was the focus for collaboration and participation in the leadership team. Meeting discussions always addressed issues of relevance to either the PDS Leadership Team or the PDSs partnering with the LSS. Further, members of the Leadership Team were not required by an overarching organizational structure to collaborate with one another; nor was there a reporting structure for one individual to report to another on the Leadership Team. The Leadership Team is an example of a loosely coupled system. Members are bound together by varying levels of expertise, their passion for PDS, and a desire to enhance ways of engaging in the work of PDS. Individual learning benefits (e.g., learning how other PDSs function, connections with colleagues) also encouraged member participation and gave meaning to the work.

The lunch meeting format fostered community by providing a venue for social interactions during the learning and collaboration. Though not explicitly included in meeting minutes, a typical meeting agenda followed a common timeline: initial greetings on arrival, ordering of meal selections, discussions on agenda items, meal with social and PDS related conversations (not a part of agenda items), return to agenda items, and dismissal. Following adjournment, members often remained for a few minutes to engage in additional conversations.

Authentic practice (i.e., engagement in activities through the development of products needed in real situations) emerged

through planning, development, and implementation of Leadership Team activities and resources. For example, the Leadership Team learned about the various policies and procedures of each IHE's PDS network through dialogue and negotiation in developing an overall manual for all PDSs working with the LSS. Creating this product represented the "practice" required in a CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1998).

Interestingly, "leadership" did not emerge as a theme and was not considered in deliberations on this research question. Yet, the Leadership Team purposefully was named "Leadership Team" to place emphasis and responsibility for members to make wise leadership decisions. It was established as a team – with a task to complete, but soon turned to knowledge and PDS needs. In fact, all theme related activities required leadership to enact and that may be the reason for the absence of "leadership" as a singular theme area.

### To What Degree Did the Leadership Team Meet the *Nine Essentials for PDS*?

To determine the extent to which the Leadership Team demonstrated the Nine Essentials for PDS an alignment of content analysis findings for themes with the Essentials for PDS was conducted (Table 2).

Findings indicate that the Leadership Team met the Nine Essentials for PDS throughout all themes. The theme of *Communication* was most prevalent, aligning to eight of the Nine Essentials. *Planning* aligned to five of the Essentials while *Accountability* aligned to four. *Reflection* aligned to three Essentials and *Resources* aligned to two of the Essentials. Interestingly, *Resources* aligned to the fewest Essentials. Given the impetus for calling the initial Leadership Team meeting was to discuss the equitable distribution of resources by the LSS, it was somewhat surprising that *Resources* was not represented in the Essentials with greater frequency. However, state PDS standards include, "Organization, Roles and Resources." and all LSS and IHE memoranda of understanding previously included language regarding shared resources. Though the Leadership Team initially addressed resource management and quickly resolved distribution and equity issues, *Resources* did not remain as a focus for collaboration.

Instead, the Leadership Team developed agendas based on the evolving needs of the PDS from a larger system approach. Likely, this would not have been possible without the existing strength of the PDS networks. Where many PDSs continue to wrestle with logistical issues such as placements and governance, these PDS networks had well-established partnerships so the representatives on the Leadership Team were able to focus on broader needs and issues facing teaching, learning, and teacher preparation. Therefore, the Leadership Team, like most CoP, evolved organically moving from one topic to another as members brought them forth. At the same time, members naturally grew in their trust of one another and in their ability to leverage resources to problem solve.

### What Was the Role of Community of Practice in Meeting the *Nine Essentials for PDS*?

The professional benefits of the PDS Leadership Team are numerous (e.g., professional development opportunities for mentor teachers and site coordinators, development of policy guidelines, state and national presentations); however, there are social, less tangible, aspects of the team that cannot be captured in meeting minutes (e.g., friendships, familiarity of member interests). Because the meetings are held over lunch, there are opportunities for personal conversations as members enjoy their meals. This contributes to our CoP as trust and understanding are further established. Additionally, members learn of each others' expertise areas, research interests, and professional experiences. Additional opportunities for collaboration extend beyond the Leadership Team, a finding in concert with research on CoP (Wenger, 1998).

The role of the PDS Leadership Team CoP in supporting acquisition of the Nine Essentials for PDS was to provide a safe forum for institutions and professional colleagues to share ideas, thoughts and concerns across what could be competitive boundaries with three IHEs in one LSS. Instead, the Leadership Team CoP continues to productively enhance PDS for all. Without the CoP that formed, the Leadership Team could have ceased as soon as the policy documents were complete. Instead members recognized the value of continued meetings in the production of collaborative products for the general "good" of teacher education within and outside of each respective institution. This finding supports those of researchers on CoP (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Cambridge, et al., 2005). Findings from this research, suggest that the establishment of CoP in a system-level PDS facilitates acquisition of the Nine Essentials for PDS.

### Future Directions and Recommendations

After five years of Leadership Team work and review of study findings, the authors remain committed to the role of the Leadership Team and the need for its sustainability as a mechanism to move forward the important work of teacher education through PDS. Recommendations to support the sustainability of the Leadership Team include:

- Review of the mission - does the mission continue to meet the needs of the team? Recognizing that both PDSs and CoP have life cycles, Leadership Team members will want to evaluate the relevance of the mission and goals to providing value to members and external constituents. Cambridge, et al. (2005) described CoP renewal through stages beginning with *inquiry*. Active learning to create new knowledge to benefit others often begins with inquiry into systems and events. The Leadership Team should use an inquiry approach as the mission is reviewed.
- Renaming the team to distinguish "community of practice" versus "team." Ironically, the PDS Leadership

Team began as a “team” with a task to complete, but quickly moved into new areas for sharing and creating knowledge. Yet, it has not shed the “team” in its name. “PDS Leadership Community” may more accurately distinguish the group according to the focus of its work.

- Acknowledging the loosely coupled system that is the Leadership Team through formal documentation in governing documents such as memoranda of understanding. The present members of the Leadership Team enjoy many benefits associated with being a CoP (e.g., sharing expertise, time savings), but in order for the Leadership Team to sustain it is advisable to plan for future members. CoP are susceptible to certain downfalls such as power dynamics, issues of trust, and personality conflicts (Wenger, 1998; Roberts, 2006). However, with clear governing documents delineating member standing, relationships between institutions, and collegial expectations, these undesired downfalls may be avoided.
- Enhancing use of the LSS PDS webpage to highlight collaborative practices and promote Leadership Team resources available to the whole of the PDS community. Given the mission and objectives of the Leadership Team, the products of team work should be shared. Continued use of the webpage and dissemination of new knowledge through presentations is encouraged.
- Broadening the scope of the Leadership Team’s role to include support of transition efforts to state College and Career Readiness standards. The Leadership Team adjusts focus according to the needs of its constituents. The needs of LSS administrators should also be considered when making decisions on future directions for Leadership Team efforts.

## Implications

McDermott and Archibald (2010) found increased use of CoP in organizations, noting economies in stewarding knowledge rather than formalized training programs. This may also be of value to PDS partnerships. In CoP shared vocabulary and understandings are more easily conveyed and members are motivated to share (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Cox, 2005). This is particularly helpful in PDS relationships where LSS or IHE leaders or school principals may change positions and disrupt an existing collaboration structure for a PDS. Given the fast-paced academic calendar, there is often little time to fully explain PDS to individuals in new roles. Learning these roles through PDS CoP may facilitate understanding. CoP also supports shared histories among members and a communal memory (Lave & Wenger, 1998; Cox, 2005). This may prove useful during accreditation visits as an enhancement to typical governance structures.

Wenger (2006) noted that CoP cannot be formed, but it can be facilitated and supported in face-to-face and online settings. IHE and LSS partnerships interested in supporting the development of their own CoP focused on the multiple needs of IHE and LSS partners, especially in partnerships with multiple

institutions, should consider beginning their community over lunch. Lunch may seem a simple way to begin institutional change, but from the experiences of the Leadership Team, lunch provided a non-threatening, less formal venue to begin dialogue and to get to know one another. Invite one to two key stakeholders from each institution with knowledge and leadership responsibilities about teacher education, teacher internships, and PDS.

Establish a mission for your community and consider PDS standards and the Nine Essentials for PDS during mission development. Stakeholders must value the work of the PDS. Successful partnerships strengthen organizational ties in loosely coupled systems. Establish leadership for the community by designating an individual(s) to prepare agendas, facilitate discussion, and record minutes. Next, establish short-term goals to provide a domain of practice for the community to begin sharing knowledge and developing products.

Finally, intentional planning for reflection and assessment of community activities is recommended. CoP may ebb and flow in the amount of content addressed at each meeting, but the life cycle of the CoP can be sustained through careful cultivation of new knowledge based on the needs of the community. As long as there is value to membership the community should sustain. Cambridge, et al. (2005) recommend strategies for CoP in higher education that may serve as a starting point for institutions looking to foster or sustain a CoP.

Further, with recent increases in international internship experiences, CoP may take on new online roles for PDSs separated by vast distances. In these cases, lunch meetings will not be possible, but encourage the use of media technologies as a method of establishing rapport. When text-based methods are used for the PDS CoP, plan for social opportunities such as an introductory get-to-know-you scavenger hunt. Keeping in mind the three criteria for CoP (domain of knowledge, notion of community, and practice) as CoP is facilitated and supported is critical.

In addition, the research theme alignment to the Essentials may also assist others seeking to establish PDS CoPs. Communication, planning, resources, reflection, and accountability are not uncommon terminology for those working in PDSs. As such these themes hold the potential to illustrate the feasibility of cultivating a long-lasting, meaningful CoP that can withstand changes in leadership, membership and focus. The simplicity in this alignment may encourage other PDSs to consider deliberate facilitation of CoP. Thus further illustrating the benefit of sustainability for CoP as discussed in the research literature (Cambridge, et al., 2005). Likewise, the themes and their simplicity may also serve to clarify and operationalize a pathway to meeting the Nine Essentials.

## Conclusions

When one thinks of PDS, one often thinks of the collaboration that occurs between schools and IHEs in the preparation of new teachers and/or the professional development provided for

current teachers. This study looked at a unique PDS partnership between three IHEs and one LSS at an administrative level, seeking to create a seamless preservice through inservice teacher induction program. The partnership formed a CoP focused on benefits to K-12 students, teacher candidates, and current teachers. This enhanced the function and structure of the PDS Leadership Team creating a new kind of collaboration for PDS. The Leadership Team is a PDS with CoP as its distinct method for collaboration. The collaboration is not imposed. It does not have a task to solve with a completion date. It is fluid and continuous based upon the needs of the community. In the case of the PDS Leadership Team CoP, it was more than planning professional development or authoring new policy documents, it was a way to facilitate new knowledge on teacher education through the collaborative enterprise of IHE and LSS partnerships. At this level of PDS collaboration, a CoP was the quintessential way to develop the Nine Essentials for PDS. <sup>SUP</sup>

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